

Navy Surgeon General Addresses Global HIV/AIDS Challenge During Seminar

Release Date: 12/7/2010, Story Number: NNS101207-10

From Bureau of Medicine and Surgery Public Affairs

SAN ANTONIO (NNS) -- The U.S. Navy surgeon general addressed the importance of controlling HIV/AIDS in global military and peacekeeping organizations to an international audience Dec. 6, during the 10th annual HIV/AIDS Planning and Policy Seminar held at the Crowne Plaza Dec 3.-10.

Vice Adm. Adam M. Robinson, Jr. discussed the healthcare challenges associated with the spread of HIV/AIDS and provided some recommendations to senior Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Health medical officers from more than 40 countries including sub-Saharan African nations, South-east Asia, Eastern Europe, and South America.

"HIV/AIDS is not a problem for just some countries, but for all militaries around the world," said Robinson. "This is a significant public health issue and not one that can be ignored."

The purpose of the course that is hosted annually by the Defense Institute for Medical Operations (DIMO), located in San Antonio, is to enhance the ability of senior civilian officials and military leaders to develop, implement, and strengthen the effectiveness of HIV/AIDS policies for participating militaries.

The course assists participants in the development of strategies and policies to execute sustainable, effective programs for HIV prevention and consequence management.

Robinson described how military personnel with HIV/AIDS not only affect military readiness, but the virus has second and third order effects that can destroy families and pose additional risk to civilian populations.

"It's a problem that affects all militaries regardless of location," said Robinson. "Fortunately, it is also a problem that the military is well suited to help with in its prevention."

Robinson highlighted success stories in countries like Botswana, Chile, the Philippines, Thailand, and Zambia, and recommended that all nations working together should look at what they were doing right and replicate their best practices across the board. According to Robinson, these countries have improved or expanded their prevention education, including training their military medical and nursing staffs.

The U.S. Military has been active in working with other federal agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and global partners in combating HIV/AIDS. The DoD HIV/AIDS Prevention Program (DHAPP), based at the Naval Health Research Center (NHRC) in San Diego, Calif., is the DoD executive agent for the technical

assistance, management, and administrative support of the global HIV/AIDS prevention, care, and treatment for foreign militaries.

DHAPP administers funding, directly conducts training, and provides technical assistance for focus countries and other bilateral countries, and has staff actively serving on most of the technical working groups and core teams through the Office of the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator.

Additionally, DHAPP oversees the contributions to the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the largest health program ever initiated by one country to address a single disease. A 2009 study found PEPFAR reduced the AIDS death rate in the countries involved by 10 percent.

Robinson believes that PEPFAR has been one of the best programs in assisting U.S. partners in stemming the spread of the disease.

"PEPFAR is the perfect example of what a comprehensive program looks like that includes prevention, treatment, care, counseling, accountability and consistent funding," said Robinson.

Robinson recommended that participants encourage 100 percent comprehensive testing for all nation's military personnel at a minimum on an annual basis, stating that it was integral at controlling the spread of HIV in military units.

"Testing should be a part of every military personnel's physical health screenings and is the least restrictive means available to reduce transmission," said Robinson. "Testing should be an integral part of every military's HIV/AIDS strategy that goes hand in hand with counseling and prevention programs."

Robinson told the audience that the Navy has an important role to play in the fight against HIV/AIDS which is in keeping with the maritime strategy.

"Our military men and women of all services are ambassadors to our nation wherever they are deployed," said Robinson. "Our military-to-military medical partnerships are a key element in the fight against HIV/AIDS. These partnerships are a part of our larger SMART Power efforts to engage with other countries not only diplomatically but through aid, training, education, and research."

For more news from Navy Medicine, visit www.navy.mil/local/mednews/.